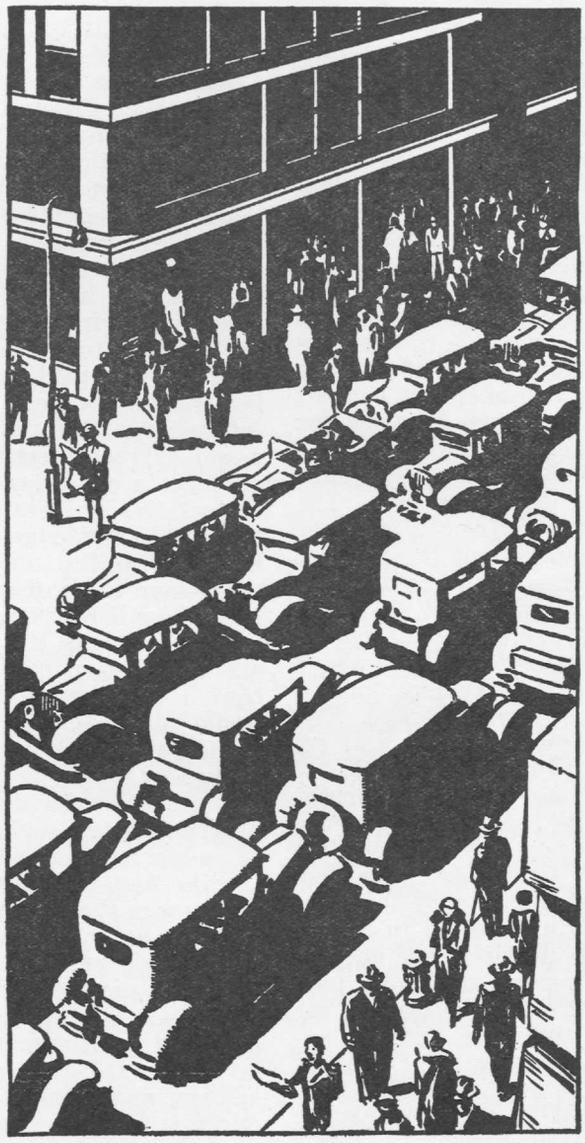
TRAFFIC CONGESTION

A Brief Survey of Its Causes and Suggested Remedies



While being undoubtedly biased in some of their opinions, members of the American Electric Railway Association compiled facts and figures which shed considerable light on that bugaboo of our modern cities—traffic congestion.

The large numbers of private cars driven in the cities make the greatest contribution to congestion. They require more street space per passenger than any other type of vehicle, averaging 53 square feet per passenger. Motor omnibuses require 6.7 square feet per passenger while street cars need but 4.5 square feet.

Parking, the attendant evil of private cars in the downtown sections, is obviously a contributor to the congestion problem. Considerable relief has been noted in those cities curtailing this privilege and the time has no doubt arrived when this privilege will be rescinded in our larger communities. Parking is indeed a privilege and not a right. Proper community policy is based upon the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number. When more people are inconvenienced by parking than are served by extending to individuals the privilege of storing their cars on the public street, the time for withdrawing this privilege will have arrived.

Idle cars belong in garages. Many cities are revising their building codes and restrictions to permit the erection of storage garages in business districts. This is a boon to those who prefer to drive their cars to business. However, certain obsolete ordinances in some cities restrict the construction of such garages in the business areas. Space for space, surveys of the traffic situation show that the cars now parked in the street could be stored in the vacant space in existing structures. The use of these garages, especially those of the Kent Automatic type originally installed in New York City, saves considerable time and provides shelter from the weather for these private vehicles.

Unrestricted parking is often defended by business men on the grounds that it helps their trade. Investigation has shown that such space is usually used, not by shoppers, but by the employees of the firm itself. This fact is quite apparent in the city of Columbus.

Roving taxicabs are great street space wasters. Traffic surveys have shown that taxicabs cruise 56 per cent of the time they are on the streets. Taxicab service has become necessary in most cities and should be regulated as a public utility. The majority of taxicabs should be operated from stands but unregulated competition forces them to cruise. Proper legislation can overcome this.

The practice of unloading and loading freight on the streets of congested areas does a great deal to aid traffic delays and tie-ups. Trucks usually angle park while doing this, taking up anywhere from one-fourth to one-third of the street section. Truck deliveries during "rush" hours tie up traffic and also constitute a grave menace to pedestrians. It is advocated that city ordinances require all industrial and commercial buildings to provide off-street loading facilities. Whenever possible, merchandise should be delivered to such places during slack periods or at night.

Traffic signals are not fulfilling their function if they halt traffic rather than move it. This fact is readily noticeable in small communities that have such installations where traffic would undoubtedly move more freely and safely without them. Other places that require signals are ignored. A traffic signal system should be planned for the safest and most efficient movement of both vehicles and pedestrians.

Among remedies cited for the relief of traffic congestion, the removal of street railways is argued against on the grounds that it is unsound from the point of public convenience. One street car carries thirty-six times as many seated passengers as one private car. However, the trend today is toward the motor omnibus rather than the electric car because of its flexibility, convenience to the individual passenger, and its compara-

(Continued on Page 18)

TRAFFIC CONGESTION

(Continued from Page 6)

tive noiselessness. Moreover, it occupies less street space than the electric car.

Street widening programs, notable among traffic relief panaceas, are expensive propositions, however considered. The cost of condemning buildings, laying new pavements and sidewalks, and relocation of underground conduits brings an added burden upon the taxpayer and the general public, who generally benefit but little from the few added feet of street space. Besides, little acceleration is provided the traffic on the street so improved.

Most appealing among remedies offered seems to be the suggested construction of double-deck streets and rapid transit highways through the congested metropolitan areas. Such arteries could be constructed to provide uninterrupted transit between predetermined points of business importance. Lanes for private vehicles or rapidly moving traffic could be segregated from the commercial lanes, thus tending to remove the impediment offered by the larger vehicles. Such a building program has commenced in New

(Continued on Page 20)

TRAFFIC CONGESTION

(Continued from Page 18)

York City where an elevated highway along the waterfront provides a through, uninterrupted route for private cars from the Holland Tunnel to Riverside Drive, the artery for private car traffic from the mid-town section to the outlying suburbs and New England.

Its success has been noted and it will no doubt be followed by the construction of more such structures, both in that city as well as in others.